

THE ADVOCATE



Be a Champion

Adviser takes a stand and convinces local school board that activities are indispensable.

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News of Note

Graduation rates are improving, but the outlook for students who do drop out is dire.

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Do the Math

Student activities yield financial benefits for schools.

6

Let X = More Diverse Activities

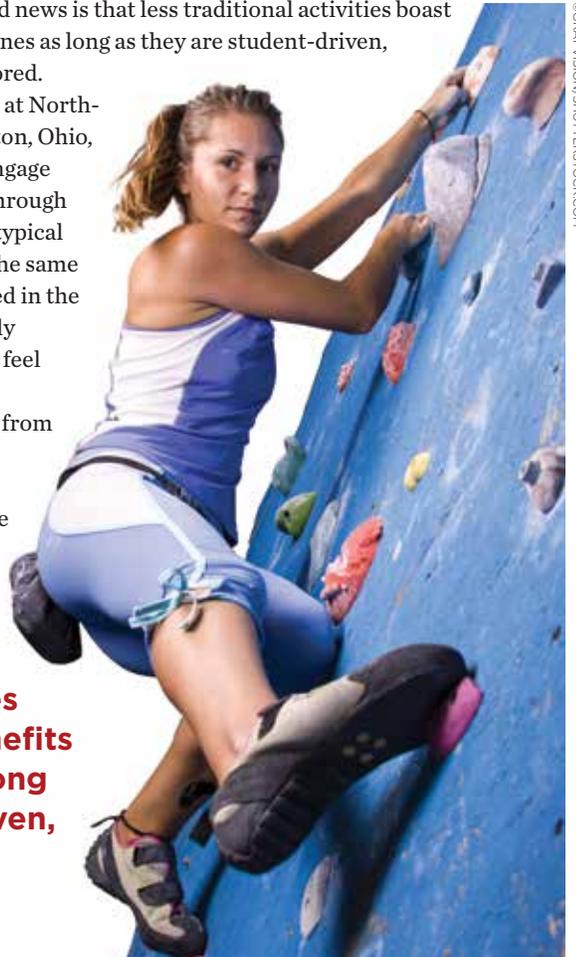
BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

You've done the math. You've heard the message. You know about the abundance of credible evidence indicating that adolescents who participate in student activities achieve higher test scores, make better choices, and are more likely to be successful in college and community. But did you know that the research also points to a disturbing trend? Too few students are participating in student activities, and of those who do sign up, many are members in name only. So what can you do to ensure that students are actively engaged?

Experts at the Alliance for Student Activities reveal that the solution occurs when X = activities that are consciously and creatively designed. In addition to the customary offerings in sports, academics, and the arts, the most successful programs have evolved to include unique activities aimed at a variety of special interests. As a result, more students are inspired to get involved. The good news is that less traditional activities boast the same big benefits as traditional ones as long as they are student-driven, adult-supervised, and school-sponsored.

Matt Finnemeyer, science teacher at Northwest Local High School in Canal Fulton, Ohio, believes that less traditional clubs engage students who might otherwise slip through the cracks. He points out that many typical extra-curricular activities focus on the same academic or talent-based skills valued in the classroom. "Some students, especially weaker academic performers, do not feel comfortable trying to stretch these abilities. This leads to self-exclusion from activities," Finnemeyer said. "By offering more hobby-oriented clubs like anime-watching, gaming, science fiction, or other alternative clubs, ➔

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we offer students a chance to connect without the risk of highlighting their academic weaknesses.”

Finnemeyer currently hosts a game club at Northwest High School. In the three years since its implementation, the club has featured everything from popular video games like Guitar Hero to more traditional board and card games. This year, the preferred interest is Pathfinder, a role-playing game similar to Dungeons and Dragons. Finnemeyer explains that even students who normally enjoy academic clubs benefit from participation. “In school, it is easy for students to get stuck in one role—good student or poor student, perfect attender or frequently absent,” he said.

“Being involved in an activity gives students a way to define themselves through a nonacademic lens. They gain a self-perception beyond factors like grades or attendance.”

At Coronado High School in Henderson, NV, student activities director Cresen Swenson agrees that a diverse offering of activities serves an important purpose. “Traditional clubs will always grab the above average alliance of students, but we are also trying to reach the other students within our school who have not had the chance to be a part of something,” she said. “We have been able to start clubs that cater to everyone. We’ve even hosted a zombie run. The students feel a sense of belonging, their self-esteem is affected in a positive way, and it helps them develop their true character.”

Currently, the high school offers clubs in more than fifty areas of interest including Ping-Pong, Frisbee, environmental stewardship, hip hop, cultural diversity, and ukulele. Swenson notes that the majority of Coronado’s clubs are based on student input. By placing students in the driver’s seat regarding club selection, school administrators are giving them a chance to develop and practice their spark, a key variable in the equation for human thriving. In addition, student-driven initiatives facilitate the development of leadership skills and encourage kids to become more vested in their school. “By coming up with their own ideas for clubs and then going to administration for approval, students are taking an important first step toward becoming an organized, motivated, and communicative member of the student body,” Swenson said.

She also notes that—along with improved academic achievement and rising graduation rates—activity engagement results in students who are more focused on school life, take pride in their campus, and serve as a positive influence among their peers.

In the Minneapolis Public School District, administrators have been using chess programs to reach out to a diverse student population for more than 15 years. Student activities director Derek Emery explains that the program was initiated as a way of engaging students from urban areas in a fun, enriching activity. Today,



“Anytime you get students involved in school activities, their learning improves. The school becomes a place of pride. The pride they take in being part of the school carries into the classroom.”

self-esteem improves, and they are proud to participate in a game that teaches analytical and decision-making skills that can be transferred to real life.”

Adult supervision, especially from enthusiastic faculty members, has been critical to the success of the chess initiative. While Emery acknowledges the challenges in staffing a regular before- or after-school program, he reminds educators and other stakeholders to remember the value added by adult champions who can provide guidance and support. “I give three suggestions to all new staff members. Let the students know you care, share the real you by letting them see that you’re a real human being, and have high expectations,” Emery said.

Like Emery, Finnemeyer stresses the importance of champions—or mentors—in providing structure and support for student activities. He encourages faculty members and other adults to consider sharing a hobby or special interest through a school-based club. “Engaging in an activity with a faculty member can help to ‘humanize’ the teaching staff and show students that teachers, like all people, have interests beyond their work,” he said. “When individuals have a chance to share in common interests, social bonds are forged. All students can benefit from feeling more involved in the social fabric of their school.”

At Tok School in Tok, Alaska, faculty members are capitalizing on their own interests and talents to help students nurture their spark and build important connections. Lucia Zaczkowski, a fifth grade teacher at the small, rural school, explains that the student activities program is evolving thanks to support from administrators and a creative staff. “Brazilian jiu jitsu, archery, and poetry are all new activities at our school,” she said. “Because we are so small, most of these specialized activities emerge because a teacher or community member has an expertise to share.”

Zaczkowski recently served as a Poetry Out Loud (POL) coach to a group of high school students and appreciated the opportunity to

approximately 65 % of schools in the district offer a chess program and the district hosts two chess tournaments a year, each bringing in an average of 170 student competitors.

The program appeals to students regardless of gender, academic status, language, or ethnicity. “The chess program brings people together. It crosses all boundaries,” Emery said. “Our student population is 21% English-language learners. 19% of our students receive special education services. Through participation, many of these students now feel like part of the mainstream student body. With chess, we are able to support academics as well as parent and student involvement. The students’

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act as a mentor in a subject she enjoys. “Hockey and basketball are big at our school, but not all students are interested in participating in sports,” she noted. “POL is a unique outlet for students of a literary bent. This year, POL took the place of a drama program. The commitment was not as steep as producing a play, and in a school with only four high school teachers, it filled an important niche.”

Along with connecting students with a champion, on-campus student activities serve to link kids with their school community. In addition, less traditional clubs help to draw in students who, otherwise, might not be participating. Tim Wege, principal at Albany Area High School in Albany, MN, details a robotics club that meets twice a week with the goal of building a competitive robot. In addition to marketable skills such as computer programming and metal work, the club benefits students in less obvious aspects. “Robotics serves a group of students that are not necessarily involved in the school in other ways,” he said. “Anytime you get students involved in school activities, their learning improves. The school becomes a place of pride. The pride they take in being part of the school carries into the classroom.”

A 17-year career in the education arena has shown Emery that student activities have a positive impact on classroom achievement. He also believes that activities are influential in developing citizens who possess a lifelong love of learning. “Student activities are inherently educational and provide valuable lessons through participation,” he said. “Activities provide an opportunity to learn and practice interpersonal skills, cooperative peer behavior, and a host of other leadership abilities necessary for success.” He adds that a strong student activities program reflects the commitment that adult stakeholders are willing to make on behalf of their students. When activities are created with the diverse needs of the students in mind, performance follows and everyone benefits. ●

FOR AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY documenting the positive effects of student activities, go to a4sa.org/bib.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

a4sa.org/resources



DONORSCHOOSE.ORG

This online charity makes it easy for anyone to help students in need. Public school teachers from every corner of America post classroom project requests on this website. Supporters can choose to give any dollar amount to the projects of their choice.



NASSP-APPROVED CONTESTS & ACTIVITIES

The 2013-2014 National Advisory List of Approved Student Contests and Activities provides a list of student activities and contests that meet the NASSP’s established standards of quality.



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF ACTIVITIES (CADA) The largest statewide support network for activity directors in the nation. Their mission is to promote and support leadership development through student activities. CASL, the California Association of Student Leaders, trains student leaders through events and activities all year long.



EDUTOPIA

This news resource provides information regarding education-based topics and best practices aimed at improved learning and student engagement.



WHEN X = STUDENT ACTIVITIES, PERFORMANCE FOLLOWS

The Alliance for Student Activities has created an engaging presentation about the impact of co-curricular activities on student performance. Preview the DVDs and learn more about this innovative program.



NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STUDENT ACTIVITIES Each December, this conference features top notch speakers from across the country. The event also offers a plethora of opportunities to network and share ideas with a community of professionals who are dedicated to student leadership and activities.

Meet Terri Wood: Advocacy in Action

TERRI WOOD IS PASSIONATE about student activities. As the activities adviser at Canyon Hills Junior High School in Chino Hills, CA, she has witnessed the benefits of activities in keeping kids connected to their school and in creating a positive climate. So when the stipends for all junior high activities directors were eliminated from her district's budget in 2010, Wood remained committed to providing her students with valuable programs.

In the summer of 2013, she took her case to the school board. Armed with materials from the Alliance for Student Activities, Wood convinced the board that activities are not disposable extras but an indispensable part of every education equation. As a result, stipends were reinstated for junior high activities directors throughout the district.

Why was it so important for you to take action on behalf of student activities and activities advisers?

At the junior high level, advisers spend hundreds of hours before and after school, during lunch, and in the summer in order to generate a positive school climate. We want to create a place where kids want to be. When adults look back on their years spent in school, they remember the connections they made with other people. Most of those connections are created from student activities at school. They remember the things that kept them engaged. I believe student activities serve a valuable purpose in creating a positive school culture.

After my presentation, those in the audience applauded which took me by surprise. I felt I had presented my case well in the three minutes allotted to me, and I was doing the happy dance inside. The motion (to reinstate junior high activities stipends) passed unanimously.

How did information from the Alliance for Student Activities help you to present your case?

I had watched the short *Let X = Student Activities* DVD at the California Association of Directors of Activities (CADA) conference a few years ago and remembered how impressed I was with the information it contained. I knew I had to present compelling information to the school board for them to see the importance of student activities and the amount of hours it takes to run a successful program. I did not expect to have access to a DVD player for my presentation, so I checked out the Alliance's website. *The Advocate* caught my eye. I read the feature article (about the dropout crisis and the value of student activities) and knew it was just the information I needed to state my case.

Handouts were prepared including the article from the Alliance and information highlighting the fact that the high school dropout rate is significantly lower for students who participate in student activities in junior high and high school.

In referencing the handout, my speech noted that activities advisers are literally changing lives and impacting futures daily. Keeping kids connected in school is an important responsibility, and it supports our district's mission statement.

How did the board respond to your arguments regarding the value of activities?

After my presentation, those in the audience applauded which took me by surprise. I felt I had presented my case well in the three minutes allotted to me, and I was doing the happy dance inside. The motion (to reinstate junior high activities stipends) passed unanimously. Stipends were reinstated for activities directors and others including the academic decathlon coach, basketball coach, drama director, and renaissance adviser.

What advice do you have for other educators who are hoping to maintain or reinstate activities or stipends for activities in their schools?

I believe that in order to do the job of an activities adviser you have to have a passion for it in your heart, but I also believe that being compensated for the hundreds of hours that are spent throughout the year creating the best possible climate for your campus is important. You need to fight some battles, especially those that hit close to home. Use the resources that are available like I did with *Let X = Student Activities* to make a compelling case with evidence that is going to show the school board that activities matter. ●

FOR MORE on the *Let X = Student Activities* campaign and to preview the corresponding DVDs, go to a4sa.org/letx.



Improved Graduation Rates Tell Only Part of the Story

THE NATION'S HIGH SCHOOL graduation rate is improving according to a new report from *Education Week*. Awareness of the dropout crisis and intervention from concerned stakeholders is making a difference. In light of this positive news, it might be easy to assume that the problem has been solved, but the sobering statistics tell a different story. Even with reduced dropout rates, there are still 1 million students who will not graduate this year. That is 5,500 students for every day on the school calendar.

For individuals who do drop out, the lack of a diploma severely limits opportunities for employment and advancement. "The personal stakes for someone who doesn't at least finish their high school education are dire," said Christopher Swanson, vice president of Editorial Projects in Education, the nonprofit publisher of *Ed Week*. "It's difficult to bring people back to school after they've dropped out especially if they're way behind and there are other demands on them that pull them away. But it's so important for what they're able to do with their lives after that."

TO READ MORE about the new dropout statistics and the importance of keeping students in school, read this article in *The Atlantic*: a4sa.org/PeakGradRates.

TO LEARN about current graduation rates in your state and the social and economic benefits of increased graduation rates, go to a4sa.org/AmericanGraduate.

TO HOST a community screening about the benefits of student activities in decreasing the dropout rate and improving student achievement, request a free toolkit at a4sa.org/screening. ●



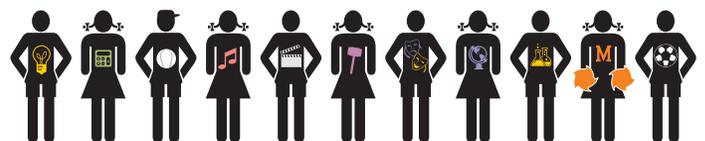
🕒 MAKE THE TIME

Common Sense Strategies for Expanding Activities

EACH OF THE COMPONENTS in Search Institute's equation for human thriving becomes available to students when they get involved in a school-sponsored, adult-supervised, student-driven activity. It doesn't matter whether it happens through athletics, student government, or something as unconventional as a game club. The combination of connecting a student's spark to adult mentoring and opportunity drives performance as well as the development of social and emotional skills. While recent issues have prevented many schools from offering crucial programs, these common sense strategies from experienced advisers can help you make the time for student activities.

- Listen to the interests of the students, and build on resources that are already in place. Ask the physical education teacher if you can use the gym for a dance club. Call on the expertise of the science teacher to host a robotics club. Embrace your temperate climate by hosting an Ultimate Frisbee tournament outdoors.
- Reduce start-up costs and overhead by organizing a club that focuses on one of your current interests, especially if it involves materials you already own.
- Ask all students to chip in a modest amount to purchase a club-owned copy. For example, \$2 or \$3 per student might purchase a video game, board game, or book for all club members to enjoy.

- Contact companies that produce the materials you will be using and ask if they would be willing to donate supplies.
- Don't discount the possibility that school administrators, parent groups, or local businesses might have funds set aside for special programs. It doesn't hurt to ask.
- Allow students to become the primary drivers. Delegating tasks helps students develop leadership skills and takes some of the burden off of adult advisers.
- Research and apply for grants through online sources like DonorsChoose.org.
- Nurture relationships and build a reliable network of adult champions by reinforcing their efforts through recognition. Simple expressions of gratitude from students are especially valuable.
- Create partnerships with business organizations, parents, and other stakeholders. Explain the positive impact that their support has on student activities and, ultimately, the community. ●



Film Club: Lights, Camera, Learn!

FOR STUDENTS in the Clayburn Film and Broadcasting Program at Clayburn Middle School in Abbotsford, British Columbia, each day begins with the production of a live newscast. Teacher and program producer, Mike Haire, believes that middle school is the perfect time to expose students to diverse opportunities. “The students in our program receive experience in TV and film production that is unparalleled,” said Haire. “Besides learning technical skills, camera operation, software editing, public speaking, and interviewing, they also learn how to tell a story and work together as a team.”

Haire explains that the school newsroom functions much like that of any professional news organization. Students pitch story ideas. Then—under the supervision of Haire and teacher/director Rob Kemp—student anchors, reporters, camera operators, and editors team up to produce each broadcast.

Not only does the program help students develop marketable skills, but it serves to build connections throughout the school and surrounding community. In addition to school events, students report on community happenings and even have a media pass which allows them to attend press conferences for a local sports team.

While Clayburn’s current program is fully operational, Haire reminds educators that it makes sense to start small. The original film club at his school started with 12 kids, one camera, and a computer. Currently, the club includes 30 students and a variety of high tech equipment purchased with grant proceeds. The group also has their own YouTube channel. “We get a high quality product because we set high expectations while providing authentic, interesting opportunities,” said Haire. “Sometimes I forget that they are only 11 to 14 years old. The things they are doing are just incredible.”

TO LEARN how to host a film club at your school, go to a4sa.org/clayburnfilm and select “Tips for School Broadcasting.”

VISIT Clayburn’s YouTube channel at youtube.com/cmsfilmclub. ●

PROMOTE THE VALUE

a simple matter of
dollars & cents

RESEARCH
VALIDATES
WHAT WE ALREADY
KNOW

CO-CURRICULAR STUDENT ACTIVITIES PROGRAMS CAN
REDUCE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES
BY AT LEAST 10-20%
...OR EVEN ELIMINATE DROPOUTS!



Mahoney and Cairns (1997) *Developmental Psychology* study



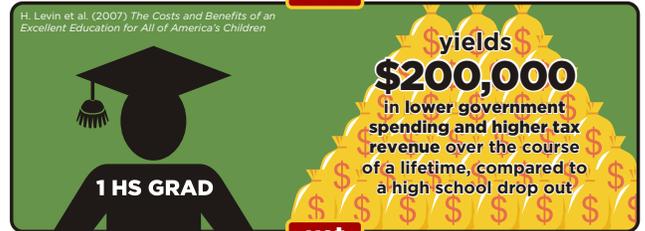
public benefit

every student who stays in school increases the school's revenue by an average of \$12,000 per year



FY 2011 data based on national median (Sept. 2013, provisional), National Center for Education Statistics
Revenue sources: federal, state, and local governments

and



yet

Even with those proven benefits, the average school district spends less than 3% of its total budget to support student activities. ?



Promote the Value.
Alliance for Student Activities

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THE ADVOCATE

The Advocate is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

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Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome.
Contact advocate@a4sa.org

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